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LAOTIAN WRITING AND LANGUAGE

212 Laotian writing has an alphabet. It is written from left to right. The Laotian characters derive from the Thai writing created by King Rama Kamheng of Sukhodya in A. D. 1283. But this Thai writing is merely a substitute for the cursive form of the writing of inscriptions in ancient Khmer of Cambodia. This explains the striking similarities of Laotian and Khmer letters.

The tham characters are used especially in religious texts, but also sometimes in novels.

Two other writings close to the Laotian alphabet are the lu, whose use is localized in the extreme north, and the yuon, used at Xieng Mai and in the bordering provinces.

213 The Laotian manuscripts written on four lines are engraved with a pointed instrument on palm leaves of varying length pierced with two holes, at one third and at two thirds of their length. The cord which is to hold them together must only be put through the hole on the left side. A bundle of about twenty leaves forms a phuk (pronounced p'ouk). These phuk are grouped in bundles (ma) which are wrapped up in a piece of cloth or else they are put in a pile held at the top and bottom by two wooden boards, and pierced from right to left with a double series of holes through which a thin cord is passed. The two extremities are tied in a knot used to carry this mass.

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The Laotian Language

194 It is a tonal language. It possesses three series of letters, medium, high and low.

193 Morphology. The purely Laotian words rarely have more than two syllables. There is no article. The words are invariable. There is no gender, nor number, only generic terms used to define men, animals, vegetables, etc. The generic categories are numerous. There is one used for leaves and all that is flat, another for round and elongated objects, such as trees and columns, etc., in all there are about twenty.

[55] Like the other words, the verb is invariable. Verbal time is unknown, but there are auxiliaries indicating a completed action. Personal pronouns differ according to whether the person addressed is an inferior, an equal or a superior.

Syntax. Laotian construction is direct: subject, verb, object. The determinant follows the determined. A question is made without